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The Political Value of Disappointment among Ex-Resistance Fighters: Confronting the Grey  
Zone of Founding

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Abstract

The paper examines how the disappointment of ex-resistance fighters can illuminate the grey zone of founding – the ambiguity of beginning anew against the background of systemic violence that eludes the predominant linear visions of transition. For a theoretical framework, I draw on Hannah Arendt's insights into the ambiguity of beginning anew as a practice of attunement that takes oppressive practices as points of departure for democratizing political action. I explore how the ex-resisters' stories of disappointment can invigorate this practice, focusing on their ability to reorient political action towards reframing unjust relationships in a way that guards against systematic exclusions in the future. The paper demonstrates the political relevance of disappointment on the example of a South African ex-resister's memoir, Pregs Govender's *Love and Courage*. Govender's narrative discloses how experiences of disappointment can orient the ex-resisters' efforts to confront the complexities of founding obscured from the official story.

Keywords: grey zone of founding, disappointment, Hannah Arendt, memoirs of resistance fighters, South Africa

## *Introduction*

*The [Berlin] wall came down, everyone was pouring across and hugging each other [...]. We had the same reaction when the apartheid walls came down. Then comes the morning after. Then comes the hangover. Realities, which during any kind of political struggle you don't really have time to think about.*

*Nadine Gordimer<sup>1</sup>*

Widespread disappointment haunting transitional societies exposes cracks in the predominant linear conceptions of transition.<sup>2</sup> In these models, the founding of a new community is based on a transcendent principle – such as divine will, natural law or historical destiny – through which to go beyond past divisions and suffering. What the prevalent discourse tends to obscure is the grey zone of founding – the ambiguity of beginning anew against the background of systemic violence that cannot ultimately be expunged and will condition the future. Conceiving of founding in terms of a progressive movement from past oppression to a brighter future, linear visions of transition miss the ways that the deeply ingrained, systemic patterns of violence get rewritten into new discourses of oppression and exclusion from the public sphere.<sup>3</sup> This paper explores how the ex-resistance fighters' stories of disappointment elucidate the grey zone of founding as a predicament that comes in “the morning after” liberation, focusing on how the hopeful momentum of the resistance struggle gives way to the murky compromises of transitional politics. Delving into the political value of the ex-resisters' disappointment, I contribute to the rich literature on the positive significance of negative attitudes for unveiling the remainders obscured from harmonious models of transition.<sup>4</sup> I propose that the ex-resistance fighters' disappointment can aptly expose the risks

of refusing to engage the complexities of systemic complicity, as well as the possibilities for beginning anew within, rather than above, contexts of violence.<sup>5</sup>

To shed light on the grey zone of founding, the article draws on Hannah Arendt's insights into the ambiguity of beginning anew as theorized in contemporary democratic theory. Building on these debates, my emphasis is not on issues of constitution and state organisation, but on the experiential reality of founding as a situated process of bringing into being communities of speech and action without reliance on transcendent principles of community-formation.<sup>6</sup> Arendt's rejection of a transcendent principle allows her to capture the perplexity of founding as a distinct challenge that should *not* be confused with liberation from oppressive rule and that involves affirming the political reality of human freedom against the background of systemic violence. I discern how Arendt rethinks the grey zone of founding as a practice of attunement, which does not seek to achieve a clean break with the resilient conditions of oppression but takes them as points of departure for democratizing political action.

I then explicate how the ex-resistance fighters' stories of disappointment can kindle this practice of attunement. I approach the ex-resisters' disappointment as an affective experience of "disjuncture" between the hoped-for-future and a disconcerting present, which reinstates the challenge of founding as a gap between past and future to be negotiated without pre-given principles. Stories of disappointment, I argue, represent reflective attempts to make sense of this disjuncture, driving ex-revolutionaries to re-examine their resistance ideals in light of the complexities of transitional moments and meaningfully respond to the persistence of systemic violence. I am especially interested in exploring how ex-resisters' stories of disappointment can reorient political action from the "us-versus-them" mentality of the liberation struggle towards reframing unjust relationships in a way that guards against systematic exclusions in the future.<sup>7</sup>

Before proceeding with the argument, three qualifications are necessary. First, the notion of “resistance fighters,” “revolutionaries” or “resisters” denotes individuals actively involved in the fight against oppression over a longer period of time, firmly committed to the values of freedom and equality and willing to assume the risks entailed in opposing a violent regime. In employing this definition, my intention is not to neglect the diversity of resistance practices nor to reify the vision of a heroic resister. It is to focus on individuals whose sense of disjuncture between the resistance ideals and the disappointing present might be most pronounced and therefore, most revelatory of the grey zones of founding.

Second, a turn to Arendt to think the grey zone of founding may seem counterintuitive. Her inquiry into the modern revolutionary tradition has been criticized for its problematic treatment of the social question and the European legacies of colonialism, raising important questions about the value of her work for addressing the persistence of systemic oppression.<sup>8</sup> While acknowledging these controversies, I seek to recuperate Arendt’s efforts to grapple with the ambiguity of founding, which, I maintain, provide a fruitful alternative to linear visions of transcending the past and moving on. The aim is not to enshrine Arendt’s insights into an idealized conception of political action that could be unproblematically applied onto complex contexts of transition. It is to draw on an Arendt-inspired account of beginning anew as attunement so as to direct attention to how we can enhance our ability to bring to light *and* face up to the haunting histories of violence as “part of the world we have inherited.”<sup>9</sup>

Third, my argument about the political value of ex-resisters’ disappointment is inspired by Arendt’s grasp of the political relevance of stories: their ability to reconcile us to the ambiguous character of political affairs and kindle our capacity to respond to the intricacies of the present.<sup>10</sup> For Arendt, stories are particularly important in times of crisis – such as those engendered by profound disappointment – when our established ways of relating to the world are put into question and when viable courses of action need to be imagined anew.<sup>11</sup> The

purpose, then, is not to offer prescriptions on how stories of disappointment can “solve” the grey zone of founding by evaluating them in terms of pre-given standards of reason and justice. On the contrary, I investigate how the ex-resisters’ narrative efforts to make sense of the betrayed promise of the resistance struggle can help them confront the dilemmas of political action in transitional moments.

The argument proceeds as follows. The first section outlines the troubling political implications of linear models of transition, with a focus on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) in South Africa. It takes South Africa’s transition from apartheid as a paradigmatic case, where the initial promise of resistance struggle ended in a widespread sense of failure, yet where the ambiguity of beginning anew was obscured under the linear vision of transition as restoration of a harmonious community. It then delineates how the South African ex-resisters’ disappointment is uniquely positioned to illuminate the murky reality of transition, opening the space for a renewed confrontation with the grey zone of founding after systemic violence. The second section delves into Arendt’s insights into the ambiguity of beginning anew as a practice of attunement. As distinct from the liberation mentality, I propose that the practice of attunement does not purport to provide a blueprint for how to transcend the remainders of past oppression. Its promise lies in retaining attention on the process of recognizing the dehumanizing effects of existing structures and enjoining a plurality of perspectives to transform unjust relations through action-in-concert. The third section explores the political import of the ex-revolutionaries’ stories of disappointment. I consider how they can trace the source of present failures to unresolved legacies of violence and orient the ex-resisters’ attempts to face up to the systemic patterns of injustice that made past crimes possible. To that end, I engage in a careful reading of Pregs Govender’s memoir *Love and Courage*. Govender was a prominent anti-apartheid activist, whose post-apartheid political engagement was importantly shaped by her disappointments over the unfulfilled promise of the resistance

struggle. In engaging with Govender's story, the aim is not to undertake a comprehensive overview of the sources of disappointment in South Africa. I scrutinize her narrative for its insights into how ex-resisters' disappointment can illuminate the challenges and possibilities of beginning anew against the background of systemic violence.

*The evasion of the grey zone of founding in South Africa and the ex-resisters' disappointment*<sup>12</sup>

Transitional justice attempts at reckoning with political violence have frequently been recognized as deeply political, "historical founding projects," instituting a new conception of morality and lending legitimacy to the democratic political order after the horrors of the past.<sup>13</sup> The TRC in South Africa represents a paradigmatic case; it explicitly served as a "liminal" institution, a "bridge" between the past of "conflict, untold suffering and injustice" and a future founded on the recognition of human rights, national unity and reconciliation.<sup>14</sup> The Commission arose as part of a negotiated settlement between the African National Congress (ANC), the leading liberation movement, and the National Party (NP), the ruling party during the apartheid years. To avoid the looming prospect of a bloody civil war and secure the conditions for democratic elections, the resistance leaders eventually embraced the possibility of granting amnesty to apartheid officials on condition that the perpetrators offered a full disclosure of their crimes. The Commission thus represented a "communicative attempt" to convert violence into "an occasion" for politics, entailing a constitutive appeal to all citizens to establish a non-racial South Africa through concerted action.<sup>15</sup>

The Commission's attempt to open the space for politics, however, was based on an appeal to the principle of "primordial" social harmony or *ubuntu*.<sup>16</sup> The principle of *ubuntu* signalled

a contextual approach to transitional justice, denoting the (traditional, precolonial African or Christian prelapsarian) values of human interdependence and reciprocity. Yet its vision of human primordial inclination for communal living was invoked to imply “an anticipated future community” through which to transcend past injustice, thereby justifying the costs of the transitional compromise as a necessary, if tragic, step towards “the greatest good” of social harmony.<sup>17</sup> In this way, the TRC’s resort to *ubuntu* was to resolve the paradox of founding as traditionally recognized in democratic theory. To avoid the ultimate groundlessness of a new beginning, theorists and political actors alike have tended to seek solace in an external principle – such as the allegedly united will of “the people” – to lend legitimacy to the political act of instituting a political community, which could otherwise only be justified as its own cause. In their reliance on a transcendent source, then, traditional accounts of founding demand of us to leap out of history, subsuming the variety of contextual perspectives under a pre-given, hegemonic vision of consensus.<sup>18</sup>

The TRC’s invocation of a “we” of a restored harmonic community, in this respect, mirrors the prevalent tendency within the transitional justice scholarship to conceive of reconciliatory politics in terms of a linear, progressive movement. The coming of a brighter future is grounded in a troubling injunction to “remember to forget,” to engage with the painful past in order to successfully break with it. The freedom of a new beginning emerges once the painful memories of suffering and wrongdoing are mastered and relegated to the past – setting aside their “haunting imprint” that cannot be fully controlled and that will condition the future in unpredictable ways.<sup>19</sup>

The TRC’s reckoning with the crimes of apartheid assumed the form of encouraging a shared moral denunciation of the evils that South Africans have inflicted upon each other, while abandoning the ANC’s initial commitment to exposing the systemic nature of apartheid injustice. The nation-building project rested on practices of atonement, redemption and the



“healing” of a wounded community, rather than the process of assuming responsibility for the conditions of systemic complicity that made the crimes possible. The Commission’s disembodied vision of transition, in turn, lent credence to the liberal understanding of democracy based on constitutionalism and rule of law, while placating the calls for a structural transformation of society and eschewing the need for continued inclusive practices of public freedom.<sup>20</sup>

The awareness of the murky realities of founding is especially pronounced in the ex-resisters’ experiences of disappointment. For them, the transition, far from instituting a new beginning, had in many ways reproduced the old patterns of systemic violence. In the philosophical and psychological literature, disappointment is defined as a response to *violated expectations*. If regret arises from our contrasting an unfortunate occurrence with a more “propitious alternative,” regardless of our anticipations, we tend to feel disappointed when a desirable or expected state of affairs “is snatched away by some unlikely turn of events.”<sup>21</sup> The ex-revolutionaries’ disappointment expresses the main sources of disillusion in South Africa: the lack of a revolutionary transformation of society and continued social and economic inequality; the ongoing refusals (mainly among the white community) to assume responsibility for past injustice; and the rise of authoritarian practices, corruption and impunity in the post-liberation politics of the ANC.<sup>22</sup> These concrete sources of disappointment, however, also assume a more fundamental, existential significance.<sup>23</sup> They concern the ex-resisters’ awareness of the betrayed promise of the liberation struggle to which many have devoted their whole lives, ensuing in a profound rupture in their sense of themselves and of their world. The ex-resistance fighters’ disappointment, then, could be described as an experience of “disjuncture” or “dis-appointment” – the sense that things “are not occurring at their appointed times” and “are not in their appointed places.”<sup>24</sup>

This understanding of ex-resisters' disappointment is inspired by the existential-phenomenological notion of "existential feeling" as an affective state or disposition that embodies a way of being in the world. Existential feeling manifests itself as a sense of reality, a sense of our embeddedness in an intersubjective horizon of meaning that significantly colours our perception of worldly possibilities.<sup>25</sup> Disappointment as existential feeling therefore is not only or even primarily a mental, intentional state directed at a given (disappointing) worldly object nor can it be reduced to a bodily sensation. As disjuncture between the hoped-for future and a disconcerting present, it reflects the lived reality of enduring something "other" than what we had hoped, challenging our habitual ways of relating to the world and others, and importantly reshaping our sense of the possibilities for political action.<sup>26</sup>

The ex-resisters' disappointment, in this sense, manifests an embodied awareness of the "suspended" or "stalled" narrative of revolutionary transformation, where the present is no longer an end-point or a step forward in a teleological progression from past oppression to future freedom.<sup>27</sup> A disappointed present is a "present imperfect," where past violence continues to assert its hold on the future as a "skin" that has not been "properly sloughed" and where the promise of a better future assumes the guise of uncertainty, which provokes the "never-ending process of looking back."<sup>28</sup> To be sure, the experience of profound disappointment may easily lapse into apathy, even *ressentiment*, finding expression in a conservative nostalgia for an idealized past or a resignation to new cycles of violence.<sup>29</sup> Yet, as a sense of temporal and spatial disjuncture, the ex-revolutionaries' disappointment powerfully articulates the experience of inhabiting an ongoing period of "interregnum"<sup>30</sup> between past and future – inspiring a renewed confrontation with the grey zone of beginning anew after systemic violence. To provide a theoretical framework within which to engage the political promise of ex-resisters' disappointment, the next section turns to Arendt's grasp of the experiential reality and ambiguity of founding.

*The ambiguity of beginning anew as a situated practice of attunement*

Arendt's insights into the perplexity of founding stem from her awareness of the manifest failure of modern revolutions, which have managed to overthrow the oppressive regimes of the past but largely foundered on the challenge of instituting a new beginning. As distinct from liberation from oppressive rule, the challenge of beginning anew entails the constitution of a public space of appearance where humans can engage in action in the company of their peers – what Arendt called the “lost treasure” of the revolutionary tradition.<sup>31</sup> Drawing on debates in contemporary democratic theory, I elaborate how Arendt confronts the ambiguity of founding as a practice of attunement that does not seek to transcend the residual effects of systemic violence, but is oriented to reframing unjust relationships through action-in-concert.

For Arendt, every new beginning is situated in the gap between past and future, “a no-longer” and “a not-yet,” which can no longer be bridged by the established thread of tradition linking events in a causal continuum of historical time.<sup>32</sup> It is a perplexity confronting humans as historical, worldly beings, who are both conditioned by their broader environment and capable of freely responding to this environment. In the history of modern revolutions, the ambiguity of beginning anew stirred the persistent quest for new transcendent sources of authority, grounding the establishment of a body politic in either an “Immortal Legislator,” laws of nature or self-evident truths. Yet, as Arendt outlines in her observations on the French Revolution, appeals to external standards introduced into the political realm the principle of “absolute sovereignty,” moulding “the factual plurality” of a given people in the image of a unified general will of the nation.<sup>33</sup>

Arendt's rejection of an external principle of founding is grounded in her insights into the distinctively human character of politics. Politics is a sphere of action-in-concert, where a plurality of individuals engage in new initiatives and thereby disclose the commonness of the

world as an intersubjective horizon of all thought and action. The status of a speaking and acting being, however, is not a natural fact, but is predicated upon our recognizing each other as equal members of the common world and so depends on the existence of the public realm, where our words and deeds assume a human meaning through practices of debate and judgement. Any attempt to fashion the sphere of politics in line with a pre-given standard is politically troubling because it destroys the intersubjective fabric of the world, which can only emerge “in-between” a plurality of individuals speaking and acting “with” each other around matters of shared concern.<sup>34</sup> For this reason, Arendt insists, the principle that is to lend legitimacy to the act of founding must be found in “the very act of beginning itself,” shedding light on the “grey area” of community-formation as a situated process of creating and sustaining a shared world through action-in-concert.<sup>35</sup> Arendt’s delving into the experiential reality of founding, therefore, is not exhausted in attempts to unveil the hidden violence plaguing all prefabricated visions of community-formation.<sup>36</sup> Determined to challenge any necessary ascription of new beginnings to an originary act of violence, she reorients the debate towards *how* a new beginning is enacted.<sup>37</sup>

What Arendt praised about the course of the American Revolution was that the new beginning was conducted in accordance with the principle of “no-rule.” The establishment of the public sphere as embodied in the constitution was grounded not in freedom as sovereignty and rule over others, but in the power potential of “mutual promise and common deliberation,” in the experience of a plurality of individuals debating the terms of their political association.<sup>38</sup> This praise has lent Arendt to criticisms that she presupposes the conditions of freedom, which any act of founding must first of all enact from within situations of systemic inequality, thus excluding *ex ante* those perspectives that are not (yet) recognized as equal co-builders of the common world.<sup>39</sup> The criticism however misconstrues Arendt’s notion of beginning, which, as Zerilli and Markell have convincingly argued, is not about “pure” rupture with what went

before, as if freedom were a “prepolitical condition,” reliant on a divine capacity of creation *ex nihilo*.<sup>40</sup> Rather, the capacity of beginning anew could better be described in terms of what Markell calls “attunement,” an attitude of being practically engaged in and with the world. Attunement is not predicated upon a rational calculation of cause and effect, but involves a continuous practice of recognizing and making sense of events as both “irrevocable” and as “new points of departure” – as something that cannot be undone and as something to which we “*could* respond.”<sup>41</sup> The Arendt-inspired rethinking of founding as a practice of attunement then concerns the kindling of our ability to respond to the worldly context and affirm the political reality of human freedom, which can only begin amidst existing relations of inequality.

For Arendt, the greatest threat to the human capacity of freedom is “the erosion of contexts in which events call for responses and, thus, in which it makes sense to act at all.”<sup>42</sup> As she insists throughout her oeuvre, the greatest crimes of the twentieth century were made possible by systemically-induced exclusions from the public sphere and the atrophy of the common world where we could engage in discussion about what specific events mean for *us*, i.e. for the future of our political co-existence.<sup>43</sup> Far from presupposing the conditions of founding, she is attentive to the need to tackle the persistence of systemic inequality after the fall of despotic regimes, tracing the ultimate failure of both the French and American revolutions to their inability to deal with mass poverty and slavery.<sup>44</sup> Yet she also warns against trying to resolve the social question on the model of liberation from oppressive rule. Reliant on instrumental mentality, the attitude of liberation purports to transform the plurality and unpredictability of human affairs in accordance to a pre-conceived blueprint, such as the given interests driven by the irresistible force of need. As such, this aspiration could be satisfied by “a sufficiently enlightened despotic government,” far from automatically leading to a realm of political freedom, it easily lapses into terror.<sup>45</sup> In contrast, the “lost treasure” of the revolutionary tradition that Arendt wishes to reclaim is contained not in the resisters’ fight against oppression

*per se*, but in their experience of action-in-concert, which created worldly spaces of freedom and endowed their fight with meaning.<sup>46</sup>

Arendt's efforts to uphold the distinction between liberation and freedom have been read as another indication of her propensity to exclude social issues (and conditions of structural violence more broadly) from the realm of politics proper.<sup>47</sup> The rise of the social, for Arendt, denotes the increasing pervasion of politics by a concern with the satisfaction of private, necessity-driven material needs, replacing world-disclosing action with the promotion of interests, management and administration.<sup>48</sup> At times, indeed, Arendt's divide between politics and the social appears to predetermine what issues can be admitted into politics, such as when intimating that the French revolutionary councils' attempts to deal with the social question *as such* led to their downfall or obscuring the political meaning of the struggle against racially segregated schools.<sup>49</sup> My understanding of beginning as attunement, however, builds on the scholarship that has developed Arendt's insights into how the social question could be addressed politically, through action for the sake of the common world, rather than instrumental calculation.<sup>50</sup> On this reading, the insistence on the distinct challenge of founding contains less a nostalgic yearning for a vision of long-lost authentic politics than an apt insight into how the reduction of freedom to an issue of liberation may easily reproduce the conditions of systemic violence.

The Arendt-inspired account of beginning anew as attunement enjoins us to think the struggles for social justice as underpinned by the power potential of individuals disclosing the oppressive practices as objects of shared concern, solidarity and concerted action, and thus challenging the established visions of consensus.<sup>51</sup> But it remains wary of the tendency to drown the associative dimension of such struggles under the modality of liberation, for instance by relegating action to realization of a set of given interests or identities conceived as previously subjugated substances. Counterposing to the given order the practice of constant

disruption, this tendency threatens to reinforce the relation of rule underlying the traditional accounts of community-formation.<sup>52</sup> The crucial point then is not that envisaging action as instrumental calculation leads inexorably to terror, but that it abstracts struggles for justice from the experience of a plurality of individuals organizing themselves around a common worldly purpose.<sup>53</sup> Thus, it risks not only missing how particular injustices are embedded in a broader field of oppressive structures, but also reducing the oppressed themselves to passive objects of greater causes. To be sure, the deterioration of the common world induced by systemic inequality may significantly obstruct the possibilities for worldly action, making the pursuit of power in the service of pre-given ends appear as the only way to change the world. Nevertheless, attempts to model the politics of founding on the liberation mentality beg the question of how to counter those worldly conditions that made past crimes possible and that continue to impede individuals' ability to forge relations of solidarity across difference.<sup>54</sup>

Rather than seeking to escape the constellation of agents and circumstances that make action meaningful, the practice of attunement finds in worldly interactions – and the intersubjective complicities and vulnerabilities that they foster – the occasions for democratizing and pluralizing spaces of action-in-concert. Beginning anew as attunement reorients attention to the dynamics of relating to others and granting them the status of speaking and acting beings precisely by illuminating the dehumanizing effects of existing structures, and inciting public reflection on how they could be changed. This attentiveness to the “in-between” of the world does not purport to offer a blueprint on how to transcend the complicities of the past in a sovereign move, but constantly strives to transform unjust relationships with a view to how to secure for each other the conditions for a properly human existence.

*The political potential of ex-resisters' stories of disappointment*

How could the ex-revolutionaries' stories of disappointment invigorate attunement to the complexities of transitional moments? To reiterate, ex-resisters' disappointment contains an embodied awareness of a break in the narrative of progressive revolutionary transformation, reinstating the challenge of founding as a gap between past and future that must be negotiated anew. This section explores how stories of disappointment can negotiate this gap, inciting ex-revolutionaries to recognize the political reality of betrayed hopes as a point of departure for political action in the present.

The political relevance of stories, or particular genres of stories, has often been invoked to confront the widespread sense of “the loss of the future” pervading the present moment – the perceived lack of possibilities for political action brought forth by the failed promise of modern revolutionary projects.<sup>55</sup> This loss of the future seems most acute in postcolonial contexts, where, as Scott writes, the hopes for liberation engendered by anti-colonial struggles have given way to affective moods of “immobility,” “pain” and “ruin,” as if “time had found itself *betrayed* by history.”<sup>56</sup> Scott offers a worthy attempt to confront this situation by turning to the resources of tragedy, which replaces progressive narratives of revolutionary transformation with an awareness of unpredictability and catastrophe attending revolutionary action. My inquiry mirrors Scott's efforts to redirect the focus away from overcoming the constraining effects of colonial structures and towards considering how colonial power has shaped the conditions of possibility of resistant action in the first place.<sup>57</sup> Yet I refrain from reducing stories of disappointment to a tragic confrontation between the resisters' affirmation of human powers and the resilience of systemic violence, which risks ensnaring the revolutionary spirit in a discourse of inevitable failure – and entrenching the stupefying sense of “violent loss” occasioned by the progressive narrative's downfall.<sup>58</sup>



Instead, my focus resides in exploring how ex-resisters' efforts to grapple with their disappointment make use of the stories' ability to respond to the historicity of human existence.<sup>59</sup> Recognising the gap between past and future, stories can salvage past events from their predetermined place in a larger whole and reveal them as a living reality in our world, thereby kindling our awareness of the worldly conditions of freedom in the present.<sup>60</sup> On this account, stories of disappointment can open up the "ever-changing time-space" of the world, where ex-resisters can come to terms with the possibilities of political action in the ongoing period of "interregnum."<sup>61</sup> They can trace how the persistence of oppression challenges the previously held visions of liberation, and how the potentials of freedom could be animated by unearthing the complexities of resistance in circumstances of systemic violence. This situated process of responding to the dilemmas of transitional moments lies at the heart of Govender's memoir. I scrutinize her story to disclose how experiences of disappointment can inspire the ex-resisters to resituate themselves in the gap between past and future, and confront the systemic patterns of oppression obscured by linear visions of transition.

In the gap between the no-longer and the not-yet

Govender entered the anti-apartheid struggle through the community structures of the Natal Indian Congress, a mainly Indian political organisation that was an ally of the ANC. She participated in student boycotts, and later joined the trade union movement, all the while directing her energies to the emancipation of women. After the transition, she was elected into parliament as member of the ANC. She describes the time of the first democratic election as "a time of letting go of the old and entering the new."<sup>62</sup> Her affirmation of the human potentials for beginning anew is made against the background of uncertainty, lacking a secure foundation

of a pre-given principle that would direct the course of future change. She links the challenge of founding to the difficulty of transforming “old paradigms of politics” in “a democracy plagued by the militarised, violent and poverty-ridden legacy of apartheid.”<sup>63</sup> Nevertheless, her story manifests a confidence in the possibilities opened by the negotiated transition, optimistically asserting that “we would go into the existing power structure and transform it.”<sup>64</sup>

Her disappointment follows from observing how quickly the liberators themselves came to reproduce the unjust practices of the past. It encompasses several concrete episodes, when the expectations and ideals that guided her involvement in the resistance struggle were betrayed by the resilience of systemic complicity. These experiences had sent her “spiralling;” they ensued in a sense of existential, temporally and affectively experienced crisis, of the self’s disjuncture from the incongruous surrounding world.<sup>65</sup>

Govender’s crucial turning point was the day she learned that the commissar of her underground ANC unit had asked permission to have her eliminated, not for being an apartheid spy, but because she was “insubordinate.” Hearing the news suffuses her lived reality like “a tidal wave that threatened to smash everything.”<sup>66</sup> She conveys the change in her worldly field of action with the metaphor of having to “swim against this tide” of the deeply entrenched culture of hate, terror and fear that led the resistance fighters to emulate the apartheid torturers.<sup>67</sup> Further disappointment followed when the parliament struck the infamous arms deal, the 1999 Strategic Defence Package that has been plagued by repeated allegations of corruption. For Govender, the arms deal mirrored the same values and priorities that guided the apartheid-era links between politicians and the white-owned business sector as well as the apartheid state’s concern with security – all at the expense of the pressing socio-economic concerns “of the majority of people who had voted us into power.”<sup>68</sup> It represented a profound betrayal of the people’s trust in the new government and significantly affected her sense of the

possibilities for political action, leading her to wearily reflect on the parliament's limited powers to influence the course of events.<sup>69</sup>

This sense of disappointment was aggravated when, after casting the only ANC MP “no” vote on the arms deal, she encountered a hostile attack from an old female friend and comrade: “How dare you betray our organisation?” Govender felt “shaken” and struggled to “understand what had happened to beloved friends and comrades.”<sup>70</sup> Finally, Govender was deeply disappointed by the government's refusal to recognize and confront the AIDS epidemic, which for her manifested the most blatant abnegation of the values of love, courage and solidarity that inspired the anti-apartheid struggle. Together with the arms deal, the HIV/AIDS issue represented a “brick wall” – Govender resigned from her post as MP in 2002 and went in search of new spaces for meaningful political engagement.<sup>71</sup>

While Govender's dis-appointments ensue in the self's “fragmentation” and distancing from the world, her narrative efforts to grapple with these painful experiences institute a journey of reinserting herself into history and rediscovering ways of beginning anew.<sup>72</sup> Her story of disappointment aptly discloses the persistence of past violence in the present, exposing the inability of grand narratives of founding to account for the worldly context which saw the rise of political violence and which demands a responsible response. It not only reveals that the official vision of transition was grounded in a particular constellation of power within society, thus contributing to the reproduction of past practices of domination and exclusion.<sup>73</sup> It also carries a deeper appreciation of the subtle ways in which “the existing structures” significantly suffuse the ex-resisters' field of action, inspiring a recognition of their limits to achieve a clean break with the past. Govender's experiences of disjuncture, however, do not lead her to simply lament the betrayal of the resistance ideals, as if all that was needed was to realize the liberation agenda over and above the murky situation of the transition. Her story manifests the process of

considering how the normalized complicities of the past condition the present vulnerabilities, and how the deeply entrenched relations of systemic oppression could be changed.

### Looking back: Examining the grey zones of resistance

The news of her near-elimination triggers Govender to reckon narratively with the many grey areas during the fight against apartheid. Apart from her own experiences of undemocratic decision-making and practices of exclusion, she lists other cases where people were killed after being falsely accused of being apartheid spies. As she notes, “destructive labels” and “whispering campaigns” could quickly lead to “terrible retaliation” from “people who suffered because of real informers.”<sup>74</sup> She acknowledges that the liberation movement operated in difficult circumstances, relying on secret intelligence networks that were always subject to the danger of infiltration by the apartheid agents. But she insists that the deep wounds inflicted by oppression foreground the need for “safeguards” to ensure that the new leaders do “not abuse [power]” and themselves begin “to speak the language of ‘elimination’.”<sup>75</sup> As she observes, the resisters’ “clarity about who and what we were fighting” contributed to entrenching a sharp line between good and evil, between resistance and collaboration.<sup>76</sup> On the one hand, this clarity allowed the resistance fighters to challenge ordinary forms of systemic complicity, such as her white and Indian teachers’ support for apartheid values, and persevere in a heroic stance of opposition against the pervasive violence of the state. On the other hand, however, it also led to instances of popular groups’ unthinkingly “ganging up” against individuals or opposing groups, while failing to challenge the ingrained authoritarian and patriarchal structures that made it possible for some to vilify and disqualify dissenting voices.<sup>77</sup>

Govender's nuanced examination of the complexities of resistance distinguishes her story from an exercise in "struggle nostalgia," a retreat into an idealized picture of the resisters' heroism, self-sacrifice and endurance as consolation for the betrayed promise of freedom in the present.<sup>78</sup> Nor does she seek to instrumentalize the restored memory of the resisters' just fight against the evil of apartheid as a new foundation for political action in the present. To be sure, affective attachments to past forms of critique – often expressed in melodramatic visions of victimization, simplified antagonisms and heroic overcoming – can revive a strong sense of group identity and community of action, keeping alive the memory of past oppression and inspiring a continued struggle for justice.<sup>79</sup> Yet, as Anker argues, such attachments are underlain by the faith that past patterns of struggle will yield a certain path towards future justice, while hindering the grasp of, and response to, the challenges of the present moment.<sup>80</sup> In this respect, Govender's complex memories of the struggle issue a prescient reminder that the activists' common fight *against* apartheid did not ensue in "the same values and understanding of power" and could not translate into a unified programme on how to rebuild the political community.<sup>81</sup>

Here Govender's story of disappointment articulates the awareness that an adequate response to the ambiguity of founding requires different sensibilities than those that oriented the liberation struggle. Her recounting of instances of corruption and intolerance during the fight against apartheid reveals how the current authoritarian practices and ideological divides are rooted in the patterns of abuse within the liberation movement. What emerges is a realization that any attempt to fashion a new community on the model of the us-versus-them mentality of liberation risks replicating the "old" understanding of power as power to rule over, control and exclude, which undergirds the persistence of systemic violence.<sup>82</sup>

However, Govender also narrates instances of solidarity that were not exhausted by the incentive to fight the enemy, but were based on dialogue across difference, creating new forms

of political community on the grounds of the divisions, prejudice and fear entrenched by apartheid. Among the examples is the process of establishing democratic structures and building the non-racial alliance between the Indian and African workers within the trade union (Cosatu). Govender recalls leading meetings and workshops on democratic leadership, where she encouraged participants from different racial and economic groups to reflect on how they have internalized apartheid's racist and exploitative mind-set and how these relationships could be reframed.<sup>83</sup> Another example of creating worldly spaces for freedom comes forth in Govender's commitment to organizing differently situated women to unite against patriarchal practices within the anti-apartheid movement. As she recognized, the liberation fighters shared with the apartheid soldiers the belief "that their job was to change the world, while women's role was to take care of their children and home."<sup>84</sup> In response, she encouraged her women comrades to discuss how their own judgements often reflected the entrenched stereotypes about the inferior role of women and to forego internal power play in favour of acting together "to change their lives and the lives of their daughters."<sup>85</sup>

It is these experiences that Govender's memoir reclaims for the post-apartheid era. As she noted upon entering parliament in 1994, the challenge was learning to use power "in new, creative ways," rethinking it as a human capacity to "build" and "create," rather than "divide" and "destroy."<sup>86</sup> By accepting "that the future cannot be fashioned from a longed-for past," her story of disappointment escapes the "temporal loop" of the nostalgic longing for the betrayed ideals of the resistance struggle.<sup>87</sup> Nurturing a desire to recover the lost object, such instances of restorative nostalgia are prone to remain caught in an impulse to bemoan the incommensurability between the resistance ideals and present realities. Thus, they may rouse the sense of being struck "out of time," failing to respond to the changed political circumstances and to engage in political action at all.<sup>88</sup>

Govender's memory work comes closer to a critical or reflective form of nostalgia, which "lingers on ruins" not to rebuild a lost home, but to make the previously hidden memories of the struggle speak to the perplexities of the transitional moment.<sup>89</sup> Indeed, the political potential of ex-resisters' stories of disappointment lies in turning "the pain of temporal longing" into a source of attunement to the present, situating past failures in the broader field of oppressive structures, and identifying in worldly interactions the occasions for beginning anew.<sup>90</sup> Heeding this potential, Govender's dis-appointed engagement with the past reveals how the resisters internalized the repressive practices of the system they opposed, while also opening the possibilities for resisting these dynamics and kindling the sense of the common world across the divides of structural injustice.

#### Looking forward: Confronting the ambiguity of beginning anew

Her narrative exercise in bringing the past to bear on the present guides Govender's first confrontation with the ambiguity of beginning anew: her leading the Women's National Coalition campaign to include women's concerns in the new constitution of South Africa. Her efforts reflected the observation that freedom and power do not come "from up above, like manna from heaven," but must start from the "frightening realities" of women's inequality and oppression protruding from behind "the rosy talk of 'new South Africa'."<sup>91</sup> Govender's story articulates her understanding that women's oppression is deeply embedded in patriarchal social norms and perpetuated by both men and women who resort to repressive modes of interaction to further their interests.<sup>92</sup> Accordingly, the campaign refrained from viewing women as passive objects of government aid and tried to offset internal exclusionary tendencies that placed strategic pursuit of power above the concern with tackling the underlying structures of

inequality. It appealed to women, across the various political groupings and divisions, to convert the hidden issue of their oppression into a matter of public debate and participate in decision-making about the shape of the future political community.<sup>93</sup>

Govender's attempts to transform unjust relationships through action-in-concert, however, were often also significantly inhibited by entrenched structures of power. She observed with much consternation how the Reconstruction and Development Programme – the national economic policy aimed at a democratization of the state and the redistribution of resources – was replaced, with “secrecy” and “lack of debate,” by the Growth, Employment and Redistribution strategy.<sup>94</sup> This change beacons a reorientation towards a neo-liberal economic paradigm and exacerbated the socio-economic vulnerability of women. Similarly, Govender drew attention to the lack of transparent decision-making about the arms deal.<sup>95</sup> Yet her disappointments did not ensue in a simple denunciation of the transitional compromise that enabled former oppressors to retain control of the economy, or of the TRC's proceedings that allowed the business sector to escape “scot-free.”<sup>96</sup> They inspired a process of coming to terms with the constraining worldly conditions, leading Govender to carefully trace the ways in which former freedom fighters embraced the repressive understanding of power as “rule over.” Appeals to the moral legitimacy of the liberation movement to which the ex-resisters owe unconditional loyalty, she observed, manifested a form of irresponsibility towards the present. They conceived of the victimized population as a passive object of government policies, concealing the continued systemically-induced disenfranchisement of the most vulnerable members of society and portraying any form of dissent as corruption and betrayal.<sup>97</sup>

As her memoir shows, the awareness of the difficulty of building solidarity in conditions of systemic violence strengthened Govender's determination to stand against the elimination of those “most powerless, most voiceless” and to carve out the however limited spaces for dialogue about “the real issues of the country.”<sup>98</sup>



This commitment was put to a profound test with the rise of the AIDS epidemic, which was met with a troubling “denial of the reality of the disease.”<sup>99</sup> Initially South Africa was leading the international campaign “against the greed of pharmaceutical companies,” seeking to ensure access to generic anti-retroviral medicine that would enable the state to provide affordable treatment to its poorest citizens.<sup>100</sup> But it was not long before the then president Thabo Mbeki changed track, chiding those within the ANC who demanded a holistic approach to prevention and treatment for perpetuating racist colonial stereotypes on blacks as “natural-born promiscuous carriers of germs.”<sup>101</sup> Seeking to challenge the still existing white prejudice about the sexuality of black people, Govender notes, Mbeki ended up reinforcing the deeply entrenched patriarchal notions of “sex as ‘the sin of lust’.”<sup>102</sup> For Govender, Mbeki’s attempt to liberate black South Africans from past oppression clouded the understanding of the problem, including its embeddedness in the power dynamics of the international trade regime, economic inequality and gender violence.<sup>103</sup>

Govender worked with others within the parliament’s Committee on Women to compile a report on the AIDS issue and pushed for open discussion. While her efforts were met with a campaign of silencing and threats, she kept appealing to others to “face the facts together,” recognize AIDS as a shared concern that reveals everyone’s interconnectedness, and “think in new ways” about possible solutions.<sup>104</sup> Here, her resort to the discourse of *ubuntu* did not evoke a future vision of social harmony, but sought to remind her comrades of the commitments to freedom and equality that underpinned their fight against apartheid. The responsible response to HIV/AIDS, she claimed, had to encompass changing the patriarchal gender roles and relations of inequality that “are literally killing women and men.”<sup>105</sup> Thus, Govender managed to open spaces for dialogue and, with the support of several comrades, influenced the government to pay heed to the Committee’s recommendations for AIDS treatment.<sup>106</sup>

While Govender's disappointments led her to resign from parliament, they did not stymie her dedication to reframing unjust relationships through action-in-concert – a commitment she henceforth honoured through writing and direct political activism.<sup>107</sup> The disappointed recognition of the worldly limits to achieve a clean break with the past, then, should not be understood as an ultimate abandonment of the resistance ideals and their sacrifice for some other good, such as societal unity. Nor does it indicate a disregard for the entrenched structures of inequality that significantly constrain the aspirations towards political and social transformation. To the contrary, as exemplified by Govender's memoir, the ex-resisters' stories of disappointment can inspire attunement to the haunting remnants of past injustice, inciting constant vigilance against the repetition of oppressive practices in the present.

Such reorientation of political action is grounded in a realization that any new beginning cannot purport to ultimately eliminate injustice and is vulnerable to spectres of unpredictability and failure. The founding of political freedom is conceived not as "an end to be accomplished once and for all," but as "an ongoing effort whose triumphs are always shadowed by losses."<sup>108</sup> In this respect, the value of ex-resisters' stories of disappointment resides in their ability to disclose past losses as sources of a kind of hope that is tempered by memories of violence and exclusion, and so includes an awareness of the vulnerability of the present and the uncertainty of the future.<sup>109</sup> A dis-appointed attentiveness to the moments that have hindered the movement towards greater freedom and equality displaces overly confident visions of the past's progressive overcoming, but also nurtures awareness of how things could have been done differently.<sup>110</sup> A reckoning with the unfulfilled promise of the resistance struggle can reclaim the missed opportunities for relating to others across the divides of structural injustice and reveal spaces for beginning anew. The recognition of how the past exclusionary modes of political interaction condition the present may increase our understanding of what is entailed

in appealing to others as rightful members of the common world and establishing institutions that are responsive to political reality.

### *Conclusion*

The paper sought to shed light on the political potential of the ex-resistance fighters' stories of disappointment, in terms of their ability to confront the ambiguity of beginning anew against the background of systemic violence. On the example of Govender's memoir, I explored how the ex-resisters' stories of disappointment can support a practice of attunement to the unresolved legacies of oppression, reorienting political action towards reframing unjust relationships and structures in a way that makes past erasures less likely.

The ex-revolutionaries' attempts to make sense of the betrayed promise of the liberation struggle importantly speak to the widespread sense of disappointment plaguing transitional societies. In South Africa, the deep disaffection of the post-transitional generation concerns the continued deferral of the promised liberation. It is directed at the unresolved legacies of systemic violence and manifests itself in a proliferation of labour strikes and community protests against poor service delivery, corruption, the failures of land reform and tuition fee increases. These articulations of disappointment may be seen as exercises in reclaiming the "lost treasure" of public freedom, asserting the citizens' right to participate in discussions about how to tackle lingering inequality and challenging dominant power relations. However, they also reflect the difficulty of beginning anew in conditions of structural injustice, tapping into the tactics of protest characteristic of the anti-apartheid struggle and frequently affirming violence as the only means of achieving progressive change.<sup>111</sup> The warning of Nkosi Nathi Biko (the son of the murdered activist Steve Biko) seems foresighted. If we refuse to assume

responsibility for the legacies of historical injustice, he cautioned, the succeeding generations will continue the fight, only then it might be “not through the power of the pen but ‘by any means necessary’.”<sup>112</sup>

The prescient political significance of ex-resisters’ stories of disappointment then lies not in trying to *manage* disappointment so that it does not develop “into emotions that more fundamentally challenge the political order.”<sup>113</sup> Rather, their potential rests in their ability to revivify the promise of the transitional gap between no-longer and not-yet as an ephemeral opening for reconstituting relationships that govern the political world. The ex-resisters’ efforts to come to terms with past losses and failures, I argued, can reveal the possibilities of resisting the pernicious dynamics of systemic violence and disclose forms of political participation that escape the binary between revolutionary violence and *status quo* as the only possible alternatives.

One might still object that the disappointed reorientation of political action towards the practice of attunement constitutes a compromising response given how the entrenched legacies of violence may significantly circumscribe some groups’ possibilities for worldly engagement. And, after all, isn’t the revolutionary spirit of freedom sooner or later doomed to dissolve and give way to the prevalent understanding of politics as the sphere of domination and rule? To be sure, a nostalgic return to the certainties of the liberation struggle can be a powerful tool for mobilizing new collective struggles for justice. Yet the aspirations to realize the liberation agenda over and above the intricacies of the transition may obscure the haunting effects of systemic violence and fail to transform the oppressive relations that made past crimes possible. In contrast, I hope to have shown how the ex-resisters’ stories of disappointment can honour the promise of the resistance struggle by inspiring vigilance against the repetition of exclusionary practices in the present. Disappointed engagements with the complexities of the resistance struggle can retrieve the experience of creating new communities of solidarity – thus

keeping alive the spirit that first gave rise to the fight against injustice and that frequently dwindles after liberation is achieved. Attunement to the unfulfilled promises of the past can heighten recognition of the however limited opportunities for relating to others as equal members of the common world and creating institutions that are hospitable to human plurality. Dispensing with a desire to transcend past injustice once and for all, the ex-resisters' stories of disappointment can inspire a form of hopefulness that is sustained by an awareness of the vulnerability of the present and the unpredictability of the future. Thus understood, the potentials for a new beginning induced by ex-resisters' disappointment need not remain limited to the historic occasions of transition. They can importantly reanimate the time of politics that succeeds the founding moment, bearing the constant reminder of the power potential entailed in forging relations of solidarity across difference and tending to the worldly in-betweens through practices of debate and concerted action.

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## Bibliography

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Hermione Lee, ‘Nadine Gordimer in Conversation’, *Wasafiri* 18, no. 39 (2003): 5.

<sup>2</sup> Adrian Little, ‘Fear, Hope and Disappointment’, *International Political Science Review* 38, no. 2 (2017): 200–212; Sean Field, ‘Disappointed Remains’, *The Oxford Handbook of Oral History*, 10 November 2010.

<sup>3</sup> Magdalena Zolkos, ‘Reconciliation—No Pasarán’, *The European Legacy* 14, no. 3 (2009): 269–82; P. J. Brendese, *The Power of Memory in Democratic Politics* (Boydell & Brewer, 2013).

<sup>4</sup> Mihaela Mihai, *Negative Emotions and Transitional Justice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2016); Thomas Brudholm, *Resentment’s Virtue* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2008); Sonali Chakravarti, *Sing the Rage* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014); Christopher J. Lebron, *The Color of Our Shame* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

<sup>5</sup> Systemic violence refers to repressive political, social, legal and economic conditions that are not reducible to forms of direct physical violence and that systematically exclude certain

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individuals or groups from the public realm, denying their possibilities for a properly human existence. The notion of systemic complicity departs from the victim-perpetrator dichotomy dominating the transitional justice scholarship and encompasses a variety of often subtle faces of participation in the oppressive conditions that made human rights violations possible. See Mihaela Mihai, ‘Understanding Complicity’, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 22, no. 5 (2019): 504–22; Bronwyn Leebaw, *Judging State-Sponsored Violence, Imagining Political Change* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

<sup>6</sup> Andrew Schaap, *Political Reconciliation* (London: Routledge, 2005), 81. For illuminating discussions of Arendt’s insights into founding with a view to issues of law, constitutionalism and authority see Anthony F. Lang, ‘Arendt and The Question of Revolution’, in *Hannah Arendt: Key Concepts* (London and New York: Routledge, 2014), 196–208; Jaco Barnard-Naudé, “‘The Greatest Enemy of Authority’”, *No Foundations* 10 (2013): 120–37.

<sup>7</sup> My focus on the political value of disappointment voiced by ex-resistance fighters differs from accounts offered in the literature on peace-building, which are primarily concerned with the ex-combatants’ successful re-integration into society and the stability of a post-conflict political order. See Sasha Gear, *Wishing Us Away* (Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation Pretoria, 2002); Lætitia Bucaille, ‘Armed Resistance and Self-Esteem’, *International Political Sociology* 5, no. 1 (2011): 52–67.

<sup>8</sup> Kathryn Gines, *Hannah Arendt and the Negro Question* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2014); Robert Bernasconi, ‘The Double Face of the Political and the Social’, *Research in Phenomenology* 26 (1996): 3–24.

<sup>9</sup> Jennifer Gaffney, ‘Memories of Exclusion’, *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 44, no. 6 (2018): 715.

<sup>10</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 257.

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<sup>11</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (San Diego: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1968), 98, 103–5; Maša Mrovlje, ‘Beyond Nussbaum’s Ethics of Reading’, *The European Legacy* 24, no. 2 (2019): 162–80.

<sup>12</sup> This section does not seek to offer new insights into the grey realities of the South African transition, but draws on the established critical accounts of the TRC and its failures to confront the enduring legacies of injustice.

<sup>13</sup> André Du Toit, ‘The Moral Foundations of the South African TRC’, in *Truth v. Justice* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 124–26.

<sup>14</sup> Wilson, *The Politics of Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa*, 19; ‘Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act’ (1995), <http://www.justice.gov.za/legislation/acts/1995-034.pdf>.

<sup>15</sup> Erik Doxtader, ‘Making Rhetorical History in a Time of Transition’, *Rhetoric and Public Affairs* 4, no. 2 (2001): 224–27, 239–47.

<sup>16</sup> TRC, *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report* (London: Macmillan Publishers Limited, 1999), Vol. 1, 125–8; Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 29, 200–201.

<sup>17</sup> Bronwyn Leebaw, ‘Legitimation or Judgment?’, *Polity* 36, no. 1 (2003): 26, 39–48; Adam Sitze, *The Impossible Machine* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 2013), 242–48; Desmond Tutu, *No Future Without Forgiveness* (New York: Doubleday, 1999), 20–46, 197.

<sup>18</sup> Serdar Tekin, *Founding Acts* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 6–7; Brendese, *The Power of Memory*, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Brendese, *The Power of Memory*, 3, 8–10, 41–59.

<sup>20</sup> Wilson, *The Politics of Truth*, 12, 14–16; Schaap, *Political Reconciliation*, 92–94; Clint van Der Walt, Vijé Franchi and Garth Stevens, ‘The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission’, *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 27, no. 2 (2003): 251–67.



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<sup>21</sup> Robert C. Roberts, *Emotions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 240–41; Kai Draper, ‘Disappointment, Sadness, and Death’, *The Philosophical Review* 108, no. 3 (1999): 392. It should be noted that the philosophical and psychological definitions of disappointment are politically problematic because they tend to evaluate the appropriateness of disappointment in terms of the “reasonableness” of individuals’ expectations and hopes. Thus, they easily lend themselves to efforts to manage or adapt our expectations or assessments of political life (or transitional processes), while attributing expressions of disappointment to political naivety or excessive idealism. What is left out of consideration is the politically transformative potential of disappointment as an affective response to the given socio-political context.

<sup>22</sup> ‘Testimony of Sandra Adonis’, Pub. L. No. CT/01110-ATHLONE (1997), <http://www.justice.gov.za/trc/special/children/adonis.htm>; Gear, *Wishing Us Away*; Zakes Mda, ‘Biko’s Children’, in *The Steve Biko Memorial Lectures 2000-2008* (Johannesburg: The Steve Biko Foundation, 2009), 22–39; Bucaille, ‘Armed Resistance and Self-Esteem’, 58–62.

<sup>23</sup> Lorelea Michaelis, ‘The Wisdom of Prometheus’, *Polity* 31, no. 4 (1999): 537.

<sup>24</sup> Eric Worby and Shireen Ally, ‘The Disappointment of Nostalgia’, *Social Dynamics* 39, no. 3 (2013): 474, 459–60.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew Ratcliffe, ‘The Phenomenology of Existential Feeling’, in *Feelings of Being Alive* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2012), 23–54; Charles Guignon, ‘The Body, Bodily Feelings, and Existential Feelings’, *Philosophy, Psychiatry, & Psychology* 16, no. 2 (2009): 195–199.

<sup>26</sup> Andrew van der Vlies, *Present Imperfect* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 15. The understanding of disappointment as existential feeling echoes the concerns of the affective turn in political theory in acknowledging the embodied, visceral character of disappointment and its capacity to orient our perceptions and actions. Yet my discussion of the political relevance of disappointment avoids the penchant to conceptualize affect as “independent of” reflection or meaning, operating beneath the level of our intentional engagement with the world and our

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socially and politically situated appraisal of the affective situation. See Ruth Leys, 'The Turn to Affect', *Critical Inquiry* 37, no. 3 (2011): 443–58; Linda M. G. Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgement* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2016); Alexander Livingston, 'Avoiding Deliberative Democracy?', *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 45, no. 3 (2012): 270.

<sup>27</sup> Vlies, *Present Imperfect*, 4, 6.

<sup>28</sup> Vlies, *Present Imperfect*, 7, 102.

<sup>29</sup> Helene Strauss, 'Spectacles of Promise and Disappointment', *Safundi* 15, no. 4 (2014): 477–78; Jacob Dlamini, *Native Nostalgia* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2009).

<sup>30</sup> Vlies, *Present Imperfect*, 5.

<sup>31</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 207.

<sup>32</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 13.

<sup>33</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 196–98, 151, 50.

<sup>34</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 180.

<sup>35</sup> Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*, 196; Tekin, *Founding Acts*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Force of Law', in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 3–67.

<sup>37</sup> Tekin, *Founding Acts*, 15.

<sup>38</sup> Arendt, *On Revolution*, 206, 226–27.

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Schaap, 'Enacting the Right to Have Rights', *European Journal of Political Theory* 10, no. 1 (2011): 29–35.

<sup>40</sup> Zerilli, *A Democratic Theory of Judgement*, 194–99; Patchen Markell, 'The Rule of the People', *American Political Science Review* 100, no. 1 (2006): 12.

<sup>41</sup> Markell, 'The Rule of the People', 10–12.

<sup>42</sup> Markell, 'The Rule of the People', 2.

<sup>43</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Schocken Books, 2004).

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- <sup>44</sup> Robert Fine, 'The Evolution of the Modern Revolutionary Tradition', *European Journal of Cultural and Political Sociology* 1, no. 3 (2014): 222–23, 225
- <sup>45</sup> Hannah Arendt, 'The Freedom To Be Free', *New England Review* 38, no. 2 (2017): 64–66.
- <sup>46</sup> Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 3–6.
- <sup>47</sup> Bernasconi, 'The Double Face of the Political and the Social', 3–24; Jürgen Habermas, 'Hannah Arendt's Communications Concept of Power', *Social Research* 44, no. 1 (1977): 3–24.
- <sup>48</sup> Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 38–49.
- <sup>49</sup> Fine, 'The Evolution of the Modern Revolutionary Tradition', 227–28; Arendt, *On Revolution*, 265–67; Jill Locke, 'Little Rock's Social Question', *Political Theory* 41, no. 4 (2013): 533–61; Robert Pen Warren and Ralph Ellison, 'A Dialogue (from Who Speaks for the Negro?)', *The Reporter*, 25 March 1965, 42–48; Hannah Arendt, 'Letter to Ralph Ellison', 29 July 1965, Papers of Hannah Arendt, Library of Congress, Box 9, 4C.
- <sup>50</sup> Sandra K. Hinchman, 'Common Sense & Political Barbarism in the Theory of Hannah Arendt', *Polity* 17, no. 2 (1984): 317–39; Ella Myers, *Worldly Ethics* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 111–38; Marieke Borren, 'Feminism as Revolutionary Practice', *Hypatia* 28, no. 1 (2013): 197–214.
- <sup>51</sup> Jaco Barnard-Naudé, 'Hannah Arendt's Work on Mourning', in *Remains of the Social* (Johannesburg: Wits University Press, 2017), 133.
- <sup>52</sup> Markell, 'The Rule of the People', 11–12.
- <sup>53</sup> Borren, 'Feminism as Revolutionary Practice', 206.
- <sup>54</sup> Markell, 'The Rule of the People', 12.
- <sup>55</sup> Raymond Williams, *The Politics of Modernism* (London: Verso, 1989), 103; Michaelis, 'The Wisdom of Prometheus', 537; Vlies, *Present Imperfect*; Elisabeth R. Anker, *Orgies of Feeling* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 203–24.

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- <sup>56</sup> David Scott, *Omens of Adversity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2014), 6, 2.
- <sup>57</sup> David Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2004), 107–19.
- <sup>58</sup> Scott, *Conscripts of Modernity*, 133–69; Scott, *Omens of Adversity*, 34–64, 121–26.
- <sup>59</sup> Paul Ricoeur, ‘Life in Quest of Narrative’, in *On Paul Ricoeur*, ed. David Wood (London: Routledge, 1991), 27–29.
- <sup>60</sup> Arendt, *Men in Dark Times*, 202–6, 96–104.
- <sup>61</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, 10–12.
- <sup>62</sup> Preggs Govender, *Love and Courage* (Auckland Park: Jacana Media, 2007), 1.
- <sup>63</sup> Govender, 8–9, 185.
- <sup>64</sup> Govender, 141.
- <sup>65</sup> Govender, 254–59.
- <sup>66</sup> Govender, 189.
- <sup>67</sup> Govender, 182.
- <sup>68</sup> Govender, 193–97, 203.
- <sup>69</sup> Govender, 203–4.
- <sup>70</sup> Govender, 209–10.
- <sup>71</sup> Govender, 241, 247.
- <sup>72</sup> Jaspal K. Singh, ‘From the Individual to the Collective’, in *Narrating the New Nation* (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2018), 119–21.
- <sup>73</sup> Brendese, *The Power of Memory*, 12.
- <sup>74</sup> Govender, 59.
- <sup>75</sup> Govender, 181.
- <sup>76</sup> Govender, 57.
- <sup>77</sup> Govender, 47–60, 100–108.

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<sup>78</sup> Worby and Ally, 'The Disappointment of Nostalgia', 457–61.

<sup>79</sup> Manuel Cruz, *On the Difficulty of Living Together* (Columbia University Press, 2016), 21, 47–48, 59; Worby and Ally, 'The Disappointment of Nostalgia', 461; Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 1–30.

<sup>80</sup> Anker, *Orgies of Feeling*, 203–9.

<sup>81</sup> Govender, 57.

<sup>82</sup> Govender, 60.

<sup>83</sup> Govender, 95.

<sup>84</sup> Govender, 98.

<sup>85</sup> Govender, 96–97.

<sup>86</sup> Govender, 56–6, 77–120, 185.

<sup>87</sup> Worby and Ally, 'The Disappointment of Nostalgia', 459, 472.

<sup>88</sup> Worby and Ally, 'The Disappointment of Nostalgia', 459, 468–73.

<sup>89</sup> Svetlana Boym, *The Future of Nostalgia* (New York: Basic Books, 2001), 49–51; Vlies, *Present Imperfect*, 100–125.

<sup>90</sup> Vlies, *Present Imperfect*, 101; Worby and Ally, 'The Disappointment of Nostalgia', 472.

<sup>91</sup> Govender, 127.

<sup>92</sup> Desiree Lewis, 'Post-Apartheid Herstories', *Feminist Africa* 11 (2008): 154.

<sup>93</sup> Govender, 124–40.

<sup>94</sup> Govender, 172.

<sup>95</sup> Govender, 198–203.

<sup>96</sup> Govender, 153.

<sup>97</sup> Govender, 195–200. See also Bronwyn Leebaw, 'If Only More Such Stories Could Have Been Told', *Law, Culture and the Humanities* 15, no. 2 (2019): 451, 458.

<sup>98</sup> Govender, 189, 195.

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<sup>99</sup> Govender, 216.

<sup>100</sup> Govender, 214.

<sup>101</sup> Govender, 234.

<sup>102</sup> Govender, 235.

<sup>103</sup> Govender, 233–39.

<sup>104</sup> Govender, 224–37.

<sup>105</sup> Govender, 235.

<sup>106</sup> Govender, 235–46.

<sup>107</sup> Govender, 252. For an overview of Govender’s political engagements after her resignation from parliament see Singh, ‘From the Individual to the Collective’, 124–27.

<sup>108</sup> Balfour makes this point with respect to democratic engagement in the wake of the failed promise of racial emancipation in the US. See Lawrie Balfour, *Democracy’s Reconstruction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 20.

<sup>109</sup> Vlies, *Present Imperfect*, 14–15; Mathias Thaler, ‘Bleak Dreams, Not Nightmares’, *Constellations*, published online: 1 February (2019): 8–11, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12401>; Joseph R. Winters, *Hope Draped in Black* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016). The intricate relationship between disappointment and hope merits further elaboration which I intend to undertake in another paper.

<sup>110</sup> Thaler, ‘Bleak Dreams, Not Nightmares’, 9–10; Balfour, *Democracy’s Reconstruction*, 19–25.

<sup>111</sup> Strauss, ‘Spectacles of Promise and Disappointment’; Karl von Holdt et al., *The Smoke That Calls* (Johannesburg: Centre for the Study of Violence and Reconciliation, 2011); Shauna Mottiar and Patrick Bond, ‘The Politics of Discontent and Social Protest in Durban’, *Politikon* 39, no. 3 (2012): 309–30.

<sup>112</sup> Mihai, *Negative Emotions and Transitional Justice*, 112.

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<sup>113</sup> See Matt Sleat, ‘Hope and Disappointment in Politics’, *Contemporary Politics* 19, no. 2 (2013): 143.